

CORRESPONDENCE

The German Sterilization Act of 1933

To the Editor, Eugenics Review

SIR,—Dr. Harmsen writes on p. 230 of his article in the January 1955 number of the *EUGENICS REVIEW*, "In the re-trial proceedings, two-thirds of the former sterilization decisions were quashed". Does this mean that the original sterilization decision was declared to have been wrong—or that the patient was compensated in money for a sterilization which had taken place—or that there were restrictions and penalties put upon the patient by reason of the sterilization decision, which could be removed when the decision was quashed?

In other words, suppose that a woman has been sterilized as the result of an official decision and that later the case is reopened and the decision quashed—what good does it do her to have it quashed?

ISABEL G. H. WILSON.

To the Editor, Eugenics Review

SIR,—After the end of the second World War, there were two main legal aspects of the re-trial proceedings in sterilization cases:

1. To the individual concerned, the operation, even when regarded as a eugenic measure taken for the good of the community, not only carried a stigma but involved restrictions in obtaining permission to marry and in the granting of economic aid to the family. The stigma was felt particularly strongly after the end of the war, especially by those who had shown full social adjustment during the war and who now wanted revision and rehabilitation.

2. Reopening seemed to be justified in all cases where there was any suspicion that the sterilization had been performed for reasons other than eugenic ones.

A large proportion of the demands for re-trial were made by sterilized persons in anticipation of some kind of financial compensation. A protest against the operation as such was the reason in other cases but the desire for children was very seldom mentioned.

In quashing former decisions it was generally stated that, legally, the grounds on which sterilization had been ordered were correct, but the facts of the case were not now given. In other words, taking into account present-day knowledge of the case, the judgment differed from the former one, which, however, was by no means declared to have been wrong. Thus these cases did not incur liability and no compensation has been paid up to now, but the stigma of imbecility resulting from previous court decisions has been removed. In some cases re-fertilization has been tried, but only in a very limited number of operations has it been successful.

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The Eugenics Society

To the Editor, Eugenics Review

SIR,—As a worker for reform since 1915, may I offer hearty congratulations to the *Eugenics Society* and the *EUGENICS REVIEW* for material of special interest to me in recent issues: namely the reviews and comments on Kinsey's memorable study by Mrs. Rachel Conrad and Mrs. B. S. Bosanquet; and the admirably clear and terse statement of the legal position as regards termination of pregnancy by Professor G. L. Williams.

It is an encouragement and further inspiration to know that the *Eugenics Society* is co-ordinating its work with that of more specialized societies, against the superstition, so aptly pilloried by Doris Langley Moore, that "Life once conceived must be allowed to burgeon, *no matter how bedraggled the blossom or how bitter the fruit.*" (My italics.)

More power to you!

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